

Animal Kingdom Calendar



Grass Roots Open Writers

2011

A MESSAGE FROM GROW

“When all appears lost, we can make a difference and if we fail, at least we can say that we tried. All the creatures in this calendar need your help; it is our Animal Kingdom to save and protect.” - Jan Hedger

Grass Roots Open Writers is a very friendly and supportive community writing group.

We hope you enjoy reading our work and that you'll be inspired to write your own.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION - OR TO SHARE YOUR WRITING WITH US

Please visit the GROW website: www.grow.btck.co.uk

Email: grass.roots.open.writers@gmail.com **or Phone / Text** 07932 231491

or just come along to one of our fun and relaxed workshops.

Creative Writing Workshop

Every Tuesday*

10.00 - 12.00 Noon

Hastings Children's Library

Skill Sharing Workshop

Every Wednesday*

10.00 - 13.30

Roosevelt Court Resident's Lounge

*Except during School Holidays

We also organise social events and outings.

and visit the Barby Keel Animal Sanctuary

every Sunday*

14.00 - 16.30

Freezeland Lane (Sidley)

*1st April to 31st October

The Otter

Otter Watch

They writhed and tumbled
Co-joined, play fighting
Sleek wet bodies
In aquatic display.

Mother whickered
Calling her children
For the butterfish meal
She'd caught fresh today.

Two whiskered heads
Popped out of the water
'We're coming', they cried
Bellies empty from play.

The bitch stepped aside
As her offspring fed
Appetites healthy, for
She'd raised them, that way.

As dusk falls, I leave
Another satisfying day
Filming the elusive otters
Of Ardmaddy Bay.

Jan Hedger

January

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
31					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

The European River Otter, belongs to the family of Mustelidae and is an iconic creature of British waterways, but was once threatened with falling numbers and even extinction.

The Otter has learned to be a secret and elusive creature, evading man that once hunted them with dogs – called Otter-hounds, thankfully no longer practised with Otters having full legal protection. Their biggest threat came with the broad use of organochlorine pesticides, used mainly in sheep dips and seed dressings. Introduced in the late 1950's, they were thought to be answer to many farming problems and with few guidelines in place, little protection was used. Run off from the mixed chemicals found its way into waterways and river courses, decimating the fish population, on which the otters feed, and also affecting the otters directly, with major loss of habitat. Whilst they could have maybe coped with hunting, they stood no chance against the chemical invasion and numbers plummeted.

They were not alone. Many creatures in the Western World were also badly affected, such as Sparrow-hawks and Peregrine Falcons.

Alarms were raised and the uses of such chemicals were banned in 1970. Man involved in their use, have also suffered long term effects. Compensation claims have been high.

But what compensation was there for our otters?

First to come was a clean up campaign for our rivers and waterways, this took many years to achieve and hours of back breaking labour and management.

Everyone from councils, the British Waterways Board and conservation bodies working together. Now once more, we have rivers and waterways to be proud of. We are getting there. Next, to tackle the recovery, increase and spread of the otter. Existing conservation bodies found themselves working alongside newly formed groups; such was the appeal of this enigmatic creature and a determination not to lose it from our British wildlife list. Re-introduction, improvement of habitat and most importantly education, was just three of the ways they went about this.

Their patience and perseverance has been rewarded, slowly but surely otter numbers are increasing and rivers and waterways once devoid of otters, now find themselves re-colonised. Like fingers of water trickling over a map, the otters have spread countrywide. Some stretches of water, however, are still devoid of otters, why, is not entirely sure; we still have a way to go; but on the whole the numbers going into 2011 are heart-warming indeed.

One area of the British Isles, the coast and sea lochs of the Shetland Isles is a major stronghold for the European Otter. There they find the peace, to live their lives and raise their young. It is where many wildlife film makers and cameramen head for to bring us exclusive footage of these sleek and most attractive creatures, who the British public have taken to their hearts.

If you have the good fortune to see an otter for yourself, the joy will be boundless. A creature, which was once nearly driven to extinction, is still with us and slowly flourishing.

Sparrow-hawks and Peregrine Falcon numbers have also recovered, with good conservation.

By Jan Hedger

For further information on the otter go to;

<http://www.britishwildlifecentre.co.uk/animals/otter.htm>

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/otter>

<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/alan.huxley/otter.htm>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/species/European_Otter for video footage.

The Orang Utan

Orang Utan - Orphaned

I felt the fear in her muscles
our bond impenetrable
broken only by a bullet.
'Run my baby, run'.
She thrust me free,
with her dying breath.
'It is too late for me now
you are the future, run!'
So I ran and could not bear
to look back at her stillness.
I ran into some new arms
arms of caring, of gentleness
arms of non hostility
arms of hope, of humanity
arms of survival
and not extinction,
beyond redemption.

Jan Hedger

Person of the Forest (Orang Hutan - Malaysian)

Canopy swinging
Primeval great ape
Forages for food
Leather-faced focus
On loggers below

Move far away
Babe to protect
Refuge elsewhere
Leave fruit to rot

Nest mother
Hammock slung
Till sun rise

Smoke curl
Crackle

Fire!

Jan Hedger

February

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
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28						

The Orang Utan by Jan Hedger

The Orang Utan is Asia's only species of great ape and is divided into two sub-species; the Sumatran and the Bornean, distinct to the area where they live, although both species can be found in Indonesia. They are true forest dwellers, spending all their time amongst the trees, where they also find their food, ripened fruit. It is not a common sight to see an Orang Utan on the forest floor. Orang Utans have an important role to play, as seed disperses within the low lying swamp forest, which they favour. It is the true cycle of life. Trees grow, produce fruit, Orang Utans eat the ripened fruit and seeds pass through their gut, forming their own compost pile and regeneration begins.

Travelling and feeding in the trees by day, they also bed down amongst the leaves, making a fresh nest each night in which to sleep.

Unlike other primate species, Orang Utans are predominately solitary creatures, males almost exclusively so, whereas females are often only accompanied by up to two offspring, at any one time. This varies slightly between the two species and certain food availability, notably with the more social Sumatran Orang Utan.

With only fruit as the main diet, an Orang Utan needs a large area in which to feed, to maintain its large body weight, so sharing, is not really a viable option. Male and females are only together, for the short time required for mating to take place.

Females are between 12 and 15 before having their first offspring and with a span of 8 years between births, usually only 3 youngsters are produced, staying with their mother for at least 5 years. The adult female herself, living until about 45 years of age.

Requiring a vast area in which to feed, and a slow reproduction rate, makes the Orang Utan very vulnerable to changes within its environment. Any interruption in its life cycle can be damaging, with natural recovery, not always possible. Hence the fast decline of these magnificent creatures. The Sumatran is listed as critically endangered and the Bornean as endangered. Numbers of both species are however declining dramatically, mainly due to massive loss of habitat and deforestation. Their future is grim indeed.

In Indonesia, for example, almost three million hectares of forest are lost each year, which amounts to over 10 football pitches disappearing every minute. Why?

Orang Utan habitat is being destroyed and degraded by illegal logging, palm-oil plantations, acacia plantations (for wood pulp), fire, mining and small-scale shifting cultivation. Palm-oil is a growing commodity, in the burgeoning bio-fuel market and in providing cheap consumerism. Home brand supermarket goods often use palm oil, as do some oil coated 'oven cook' foods. We can all be aware of this when we shop and decline to buy these products, and write to the companies involved with our reasons for doing so. No one wants to deprive the local people, of their much needed income, but the palm-oil plantations need controlling and research into their sustainability, as in the farming of other oil producing plants. As for bio-fuel, yes we do need a greener fuel, but at what cost? Is the extinction of the Orang Utan too high a price to pay?

Strangely the drive for recyclable packaging/products, which we are led to believe are 'good for the environment' is also responsible for the rate of decline of the forest. Trees are also felled for Acacia plantations, in order to produce the wood pulp needed, for recyclable means.

Together with the other reasons mentioned above, the habitat for Orang Utans is shrinking fast, and the race to protect them, happens every single day, by dedicated conservationists. Desperate the Orang Utans move closer to human habitation, bringing them into conflict with the local people, who regularly shoot them; whether they have young or not. Babies are captured, or flee, chance of survival slim. This is another area in which the conservationists are heavily involved in, often negotiating the release of youngsters into their care, for rehabilitation and release, into a safe, protected area. Such splendid, gentle forest dwellers do not deserve such persecution, from man.

<http://www.orangutan.org.uk/>

<http://www.orangutanproject.com/index.php>

The Elephant

Elephants are big and beautiful.

They have large trunks
which they eat and drink with
and some have tusks.

When I went to Port Lympne
there were three elephants,
mother, father and baby.

They were fantastic.

I remember watching Blue Peter
when they had an elephant on it
and there was a man from a zoo.
He was washing it with a brush.

Maria Gethin

To mistake an elephant is absurd
Its tusks and trunk make for amusement
The largest mammal on the earth
Is used as a beast of burden
Elephants are mother nature's Picasso
A genius work of art

Maggie Palmer

March

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

The Elephant by Maggie Palmer and Sue Horncastle

Elephants are the earth's largest living land mammal, of which two species survive.

The larger is the African which has large ears and two fingers at the end of the trunk. Also it has four nails on the front feet and three on the back.

Indian elephants have smaller ears than the African counterpart. On the end of the Indian's trunk is one finger and on its front feet it has five nails and on the back feet it has four.

African elephants were used as war horses but now most zoos have elephants for a breeding programmes because in the wild they are killed for Bush meat and in the mistaken, idiotic, belief that ivory has magical properties.

Indian elephants have for centuries been trained to do heavy work, mainly in logging.

Elephants cannot jump. If anything gets in their way they either lift it out of the way or smash it smaller.

Elephants for the most part are hairless except for their eyelashes and the tuft on the end of their tail.

Elephants are a matriarchal society, only allowing the male into the herd when a female is in oestrus. The young teenage males are driven out of the herd to stop inbreeding. Elephants very rarely live beyond seventy years. - *Maggie Palmer*

The African Elephant is the largest and most powerful of all living land mammals. It is also probably the most gentle, living in peaceful family units.

Elephants are social animals and have very strong family ties. So close are their relationships that they will not leave a dead companion. They grieve over their loss, staying by the grave for many hours after death.

Cows and calves live in family units under the leadership of a mature female to whom every member of the group is related.

Young bulls are driven from their family when they reach puberty.

Adult bulls live alone and are permitted to join a family unit only briefly when a female is ready to mate.

Although herds may wander great distances they never move far from water.

Any conflicts are usually settled peacefully.

Elephants are entirely vegetarian and eat mostly grasses, foliage, small branches, twigs and fruit.

Elephants mate when they are 14 or 15 years old. - *Sue Horncastle*

Organisations that work to help elephants

Elephant Family <http://www.elephantfamily.org>

International Fund for Animal Welfare <http://www.ifaw.org>

World Wildlife Fund <http://www.wwf.org.uk>

The African Wild Dog

“Misunderstood and maligned and slaughtered for decades, the painted dog arguably the most caring and social mammal alive, now is has the unenviable title of being highly endangered and needs our support.”

Dr Gregory Rasmussen, IUCN/SSC Canid Specialist group, Painted Dog Conservation

Social Structure

Canvas stretching the Savannah
Horizon a softening watercolour
Palette green and granular brown
Acacia bleeds a thorny crown
Paper Mache of hinterlands
Landscape of Africa commands.

Pups emerge from coolness deep
Painted dogs brush eyes from sleep
Socially establishing hierarchy
Nose to nose, lip-licking servility
Greeting, with vibrant sounds
Alpha pair head wild dog hounds.

Family portrait interconnection
Collage of distinct pigmentation
Framed in dawns Scumble Glaze
Belonging in this timeless place
A pack of travelling vagabonds
Of Africa's vast battlegrounds.

Jan Hedger

Until the Hunt

Pulsating heat on
painted dogs, relentlessly
fingers the hushed shade
of the Kopjes, where they rest
till the shadow of dusk cries.

Jan Hedger

If Only...

They kill to eat, to feed the next generation
Not out of greed or for self gratification
They care for the young, the injured, the sick
Do not abuse, mistreat, just to turn a trick
If only man was as blameless...

Jan Hedger

April

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
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4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

The African Wild Dog by Jan Hedger

The African Wild Dog (otherwise known as The Painted Dog/ Wolf) is an integral part of the landscape of Africa. Quite simply, they belong there; tracing their evolutionary history back 40 million years. They don't immediately spring to the forefront of the mind when one thinks of the wild animals of Africa and that is a shame because they deserve their voice to be heard.

Living in a pack, of anything, up to thirty they have an intricate and amazing social structure, each member playing their part. The pack is led by an Alpha male and female pair, with the female 'aunties', helping to raise the pups and along with young males 'uncles' remaining within the family, the pups have plenty of role models. Usually, it is the prerogative of the Alpha female to breed, but it is not unknown for other females within the pack to give birth.

The dogs are nomadic, covering vast distances; only denning when pups are born and they are old enough to keep up with the pack. Whilst others go out to hunt, 'baby sitters' are left to mind the pups, which along with young and ill dogs are always fed first.

Working as a pack, they are fast and powerful hunters, splitting and flanking, in order to bring down their prey (e.g. Impala) despatching the kill quickly to feed avidly before losing it to other stronger competitors.

Much social interaction takes place to reinforce the family structure, with lip-licking, sniffing and scent exchange, accompanied by squeaky, thin tones of vocalisation, heightened before a hunt takes place.

With such strong co-operation, you may ask why they are threatened.

100 years ago the approximate estimated population was between 300,000 and 500,000 animals. Now the estimate is some 3,000 animals. The Painted Dog has been wiped out, from 25 of the 39 countries in which it formally resided. Its main stronghold is now Eastern and Southern Africa.

Canine diseases from domestic dogs, such as rabies, but mostly distemper, have decimated whole packs, as man has encroached further into their territory, often holding the wild dogs in disdain, as a 'wicked creature' whilst their own dogs range freely.

With the loss of territory and dogs ranging great distances, roads with increasing traffic, are a major killer of single dogs within a pack. Even the loss of a single dog can upset the pack equilibrium and *all* deaths have an effect on the gene pool. Males and females, of breeding age have to break away from their own packs and integrate, to form unrelated alliances; 'to spread the gene pool'.

Poaching, poisoning and snares also take their toll, as human farmers, subjected to land reforms and desperation, move further into wildlife reserves.

How can we help these much maligned Painted Dogs?

We can help raise awareness, lift their profile, say 'hey we are here, we exist!' Because at the moment, the fact they are endangered, is often ignored, swept under the carpet. Being not as enigmatic, as say, the mountain gorilla or the tiger – they don't 'catch the attention'. Conservation bodies fight this battle daily.

Working alongside local people, conservationists are treating injured and diseased dogs, rehabilitating and in the longer term, working to expand the gene pool to ensure the African Wild Dog has a future.

Dr Gregory Rasmussen, of the www.painteddog.org who kindly provided the quote on the front of this page, has worked tirelessly in furtherance of the well being of the dogs.

Another conservation body is; www.awdconservancy.org/

Please take a look, because the dogs' Social Structure will enthral and captivate you too!

The Bee

Honey

It is her fragrance that first captivates me
With seductive intent, she entices me
Vertiginously. My
Circumscribed proposal
Is eagerly accepted

Voluptuous in my crushed velvet bodice
bombilating with anticipation
My jet black eyes gleam
Like multi-faceted jewels
Her sweetness is my passion

She wantonly reclines within her bower
Licentious I explore her innermost parts
Concealed amongst tiers
Of ruffled petticoats
We both tremble at my touch

Intoxicated - I plunder everything
Hoarded within. Scented sheets implore me
To take it, take it all
Until, sated, I weave
Drunkenly back to my Queen

Ashley Jordan

The Bee

The bee buzzes and stings
and hangs round sticky
things and drinks.

They are a nuisance and
they are a yellow colour.

They hang round flowers.

They frighten people and
people want them to go
away.

They cling to people's
bodies, they buzz, they
hum, they sting.

They are yellow and
brown.

Sue Horncastle

May

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
30	31					1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	22	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

The Bee by Sue Horncastle & Ashley Jordan

The life of a honey bee begins when the queen lays a single egg in each cell of the comb. If fertilised, the resulting bee will be a worker; an unfertilised egg always produces a drone.

Bees make honey from nectar – a sugary liquid produced by flowers. The bee drinks nectar through its proboscis and stores the liquid in its abdominal honey sac. The bee visits 500 – 1000 blossoms before a honey sac is full. She then returns to the hive and passes the nectar to young workers.

Many plants and food crops are depend upon bees to pollinate them. It has been said that if all bees were to become extinct, human beings would also become extinct a few years later. Approximately one-third of our food (the crops that we and our livestock eat) depends upon the bees for pollination.

Threats to Bees

Pesticides are decimating the British Bee populations and we now have only twenty-five native species left, seven of which are in imminent danger of becoming extinct.

Due to the loss of habitat, Bee colonies are becoming isolated and are in-breeding. The resulting loss of genetic diversity seems to be weakening them and making them more susceptible to diseases and parasitic infections.

Common wasps attack and kill bees and take them back to their burrows to feed to their young.

Climate change is also having a negative impact upon bees. Flowers are tending to appear earlier each year - before the bees wake from their hibernation. This means a breakdown in the synchronisation of the bee and plant life cycles, further reducing the amount pollination carried out by bees.

Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) is a mysterious phenomenon that is wiping out huge numbers of bees. Since 2006 more than three million bee colonies in the US and billions of honey bees worldwide have died. No-one knows what causes CCD or how to prevent it.

What can you do?

1. NEVER use pesticides – and tell other people not to use them either. Sign petitions to ban the use of pesticides. Buy organic produce – the more demand there is for pesticide-free food, the more farmers will be encouraged to switch to organic farming methods.
2. Plant flowers and shrubs that will attract bees to your garden. Bees particularly like like Apple, Borage, Foxgloves, Geraniums, Honeysuckle, Mint... Google for many more!
3. Make a wooden bee house so that solitary bees have a safe place to nest and breed.
4. Leave the honey for the bees. Use Agave Nectar or Maple Syrup instead of honey.

Organisations that are working to protect bees.

1. Bumble Bee Conservation Trust <http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org>
2. Barefoot Bee-Keeper <http://www.biobees.com>
3. Help Save Bees <http://www.helpsavebees.co.uk>

The Whale

Whale sings sweet and clear
In harmony with its world
Blue as the ocean.

Jan Hedger

Steaming in a pod
Blowing out plumes of water
Generating heat.

Jan Hedger

Bull whale leads them in
Circling in planned entrapment
A vulnerable seal.

Jan Hedger

Elemental Queen
Regal grace compels with song
We are connected

Ashley Jordan

The blue-gray whale dives and dips into the
deepest part of the ocean.

He grunts and hums, moans and clicks to
communicate to the other whales.

The blue whale is speedy, sleek and
synchronises as he swims through the cold
waters.

He blows and dives and spouts water from his
air-hole.

He is long, very long, the largest animal on
earth and when we hear him from far far
away he sounds like a jet, crossing the blue
skies.

His long thin flippers glide the water back to
make a pathway in the underworld, the
underworld where his big heart beats in
rhythm with currents of the ocean deep.

Sue Rabbett

June

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
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6	7	8	9	10	11	12
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27	28	29	30			

The Blue Whale by Sue Horncastle & Sue Rabbett

Blue Whales are enormous. They are the largest creature ever to have lived on the earth. The biggest ever recorded was 31 metres long and the heaviest recorded weight is 128,000 kilograms. The tongue alone weighed more than an elephant. Their flippers are 3 – 5 metres long. Because of their great size, the Blue Whale was a prime target for the whaling industry. In the whaling season of 1930 – 1931, antarctic whalers slaughtered 30,000 Blue Whales. There are now only about 10,000 left.

The life span of a Blue Whale is 30 – 40 years. The Blue Whale is actually grey and blue with white / grey spots. English sailors used to call it 'sulphur bottom' because they often have a greenish yellow algae growing on their underside, which disguises their colour.

Blue whales communicate by grunting, humming, moaning and clicking their tongues. They are the loudest animals on earth. Their 180 decibel call is louder than a jet, which is only 140 decibels.

Blue Whales can swim at speeds of up to 50 kilometres per hour, but only for short bursts.

Blue whales feed on krill and plankton and tiny fish. They gulp huge numbers of these tiny organisms into their mouth and then expel the water. Their baleen acts like a filter and ensures that none escape.

Threats to Whales

Although commercial whaling was banned in 1986, some countries ignore this. Sometimes Blue Whales are killed in accidental collisions with ships and boats. A pack of Killer Whales (Orcas) have been known to hunt and kill young blue whales. 99% of the world's Blue Whales are now gone. However since the whaling ban the population has slowly started to recover.

Both National Whale Day and World Ocean Day fall in the month of June each year.

What can you do?

Sign all the petitions to help whales at:

www.avaaz.org/en/ and

<http://www.care2.com/find/site#q=whale>

Some organisations that are working to protect whales.

The Ocean Project <http://www.theoceanproject.org>

Campaign Whale <http://www.campaign-whale.org>

The Whale Trust <http://www.whaletrust.org>

Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society <http://www.wdcs.org.uk>

The Chicken

The Cockerel

Each dawn the cock he struts his stuff
Every feather hoity toity high fallutin'
He swaggers to his calling perch
Bawls cock-a-doodle-doo
"START WORKING"
He keeps the animals alert
To watch for predators snooping
The fox, the stoat who kill for kicks
Find careless creatures easy pickings
Evil slitted eyes are covetous
Along with sodden jaws salivating
They sense the cock is vigilant
Then feebly kitter away, skulking

Maggie Palmer

The cock is crowing all day long
It is not a pretty song
I wish that he would lose his voice
And put an end to his dreadful noise!

Ashley Jordan

What a Hoot!

"Why must I lay eggs Chicken George", said Hattie preening her feathers.
"Because my love that's what you were put on this earth to do."
"You're so, so boring Chicken George, why can't you use your imagination like I do?"
"Oh Hattie, how many years have we walked up and down this coop, with the evil eyes of the foxes staring at us each night. Why can't you be thankful?"
"Chicken George you're not the chicken you used to be? Hattie closed her eyes, tucked her head under her wing and drifted off in the heat of the sun.
Chicken George nestled down beside her and knew tomorrow she would be her old self, moaning and groaning about wanting different coloured eggs that held some magic.

Sue Rabbett

July

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
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11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

The Chicken by Maggie Palmer

Humans developed today's breeds of chicken from the jungle fowl and prairie chicken. Centuries of selective breeding produced distinct strains.

Today chicken and eggs are the cheapest food in the shops. These came about by deep-litter farming.

The farmers increase natural light with electric light fooling the birds to lay eggs out of season, which meant that the meat birds were ready to be killed at 12 weeks.

Animal Rights organisations concerned about this cruelty are protesting to governments to change the laws governing chicken welfare.

Chickens have contagious diseases which can jump across to other species, namely Bird Flu and Chicken Cholera both of which can be fatal to humans.

Most of Britain's eggs are produced on battery farms, where the hens are squashed together in small cages. They can never spread their wings, scratch in the earth, perch or make a nest, dust-bathe, search for food that is tasty and natural, or even walk or run. Chickens kept under these conditions become weak, depressed and often injure themselves or each other trying to turn around. Battery hens are fed a cocktail of steroids to force them to grow much faster than normal. This rapid increase in size and weight causes their legs to break. The Agricultural and Food Research Council states that one third of battery hens suffer from broken bones.

Only eggs and chickens which are labelled 'Free Range' really are free range. All other labels such as 'farm fresh', 'country fresh' and 'fresh from the countryside' although they sound healthy and natural, mean the eggs actually came from battery hens. Also please remember that many everyday products (such as cakes, puddings, pasta, quiche and flans) have egg in them - and unless the eggs are specified as 'Free Range' in the list of ingredients, then they have been made with eggs from battery hens.

What Can You Do?

- Sponsor a Chicken at the Barby Keel Animal Sanctuary
- Become Vegetarian or Vegan
- If you really can't give up meat, only buy 'Free Range' chickens and eggs.

Organisations Working to Help Chickens

- Barby Keel Animal Sanctuary <http://www.barbykeel.btck.co.uk>
Pipzedene, Freezeland Lane, Sidley, East Sussex, TN39 5JD (01424) 222032
- British Hen Welfare Trust <http://www.bhwt.org.uk>
- People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals <http://www.peta.org.uk>
- World Society for Protection of Animals <http://www.wspa.org.uk>
- Royal Society for the Protection of Animals <http://www.rspca.org.uk>

The Platypus

Mr and Mrs Platypus had been asleep in their burrow. Mr Platypus stretched and said to Mrs platypus, "So love, we've been together a while now, how about we hear the pitter patter of tiny feet?" Mrs platypus yawned and rubbed her eyes. "Ummm, yeah, maybe." she said half heartedly. With that Mr platypus went off for breakfast. Mrs platypus started to think about having her own young ones and decided that maybe it wasn't such a bad idea after all. "I'll catch up with him later" she said out loud, then swam off to get her own breakfast.

It was cold in the river, but that never bothered either platypus. When their cheek pouches were full of worms, shrimps, crayfish and larvae, they both met up in their burrow to eat. In between mouthfulls they discussed their family ideas. Sometime later Mrs platypus woke up Mr platypus and said, "I'm going to lay our eggs....NOW!!!" Mr platypus didn't seem very excited. All he did was roll over and went back to sleep. "Typical," Mrs platypus groaned.

And with that out popped 3 leathery eggs. Now it was time to count the days until they could meet their babies. 28 days later the eggs gradually began to crack open and the 3 tiny, bald and blind babies arrived. Mrs platypus snuggled down next to them to allow them to enjoy a good feed. After all, it's very hard work digging yourself out of an egg. Mrs platypus did everything for her babies every single day. Mr platypus did nothing but go looking for food to feed his own belly. About 3, maybe 4, months later the baby platypus grew their fur and were doing everything. Their mum took them out to the river to teach them how to dive down to the river bed and scramble about for food. Meanwhile, Mr platypus did nothing with his babies. but Mrs platypus enjoyed every moment. She was a very proud mum and loved to watch her children growing up. Will she be tempted to do it all again? Never say never.

Debbie Feltz

August

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	10	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

The Platypus by Debbie Feltz

The platypus name comes from the Greek word Ornithynchus Anainus. It means flat and foot. It is the animal emblem for New South Wales. The male platypus is larger than the female and has a poisonous venom spur on its hind legs. This is mainly used when fighting other males over a female in breeding season but it can also cause a nasty injury to anyone who tries to pick one up.

It lives in rivers on the eastern side of Australia from the cold highlands of Tasmania and the Australian Alps to the tropical rainforests of coastal Queensland and as far north as the base of Cape York peninsular. Inland its distribution is not well known.

It is extinct in South Australia and no longer found in main parts of Murray Darling Basin, possibly due to declining water levels brought about by extensive land clearing and irrigation schemes.

In captivity the platypus can live up to around 17 years, whilst wild platypus have been recaptured when 11 years old. Mortality rates appear to be low. Natural predators are snakes, water rats, hawks, owls and eagles, and, in North Australia, crocodiles. Platypuses are sometimes killed on the roads, by getting caught in fishing nets, by domestic animals such as cats and dogs and by contaminants in the water in which they live. They are at risk from damage to their habitat caused by agriculture and poor waste management or anything that can harm the creatures on which they feed or pollutes the waterways in which they live.

Until the early 20th century it was hunted for its fur, but it is now a protected animal and is now no longer under threat.

When a dead specimen of a platypus was brought to the British Museum in 1799, many scientists believed it was a hoax because of its peculiar appearance. It was only when more platypus specimens arrived in England that naturalists finally believed that the creature was real.

The platypus is a carnivore and feeds on worms, insect larvae, fresh water shrimps and fresh water crayfish. They cannot breath under water but they can stay down for up to one minute when foraging for food.

The Platypuses burrow is in the river bank, hidden under a protective tangle of roots. It breeds between June and October and lays 1-3 leathery eggs. After 28 days the young hatch and are blind and bald. They feed from their mother for 3-4 months. The male platypus takes no role in raising the young.

What Can You Do?

Sponsor a platypus from the Australian Platypus Conservancy.

Organisations working to help Platypuses

Australian Platypus Conservancy

<http://www.platypus.asn.au/>

The Tiger

"Mummy, mummy, I want a pet."
 Suzie screeched several times. She'd
 been going on about this for ages but
 her mum was reluctant to give in;
 She always said the same thing "Not
 now dear, it's just too expensive."
 On Saturday Suzie and her brother
 were taken to the zoo. As they
 walked around Suzie was fascinated
 with the animals. Then she came to
 the tigers.

Tiger, Tiger shining bright, hunting in the moonlit night.
 Prowling in the dense long grass, for unsuspecting prey to pass.
 Amber eyes blazing like fire, filled with longing and hungry desire.
 Tail flicking up and down, the tiger kneads the barren ground.
 Focused on what lies before, the tigers claws begin to draw.
 Moving nearer with each step, hot and steamy silent breath.
 Creeping, crawling, crouching low, in the darkness ready to go.
 Slowly standing to his feet, he sprints and runs his lunch to greet.
 Flashes of orange, black and white, rise and take chase in the night,
 leaping, snatching living flesh, till suffocation brings it to its death.

Judi Downes

"Mummy, I want a tiger, they're beautiful." She screeched in excitement. There were a few tigers around the enclosure, stalking about and looking around not really taking any notice of anyone or anything. Suzie loved their beautiful striking colours. The jet black stripes standing out against the burnt orange background of their coats, and eyes open wide. One tiger in particular had caught her eye, prowling around so proud. He strolled over to where the family were watching eagerly. Suzie was mesmerized, not taking her eyes off him for one second. "He's amazing mum." Suzie said, jumping up and down in excitement, as if she was going to burst. "Can we take him home as a pet.....PLEASE?" She begged. His bright yellow eyes were staring wide and electrifying, with his pupils standing out clearly. His great big feet spreading out over the ground. Then he opened his mouth wide to expose his yellowish, sharp thick teeth and let out an incredible ROAR!!! Out came a scream from Suzie and her brother.

"Well, that would wake you up in the mornings for school wouldn't it kids?" Laughed mum.

With that the tiger turned his back on them all and padded off in a teenagerish stroppy attitude, with a swagger of his backside. When they got over the shock they went off to get an ice-cream.

"So, do you still want a tiger for a pet then" Dad asked

"Well..... yes, but smaller and from the toyshop please daddy" Suzie said quietly

They all laughed and got on with their day out.. - *Debbie Feltz*

September

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

The Tiger by Judi Downes

Tiger stripes are like human fingerprints- no two tigers have the same markings. White tigers are actually cream with chocolate-brown stripes and ice blue eyes. The Siberian tiger is the largest it can grow to 3.3m long not including the tail and weigh up to 300kg. The tiger is now one of the most endangered cats. The number of Siberian, Sumatran, South China and Indo-Chinese tigers added together would only be a few thousand left in the wild.

WWF Adopt a tiger - In the past 100 years, wild tiger numbers have plummeted by around 95%, to as few as 3,200. Help us protect the future of the world's largest big cat. How we are helping the tigers:

- Restoring fragmented areas of habitat so tigers can move between them.
- Strengthening anti-poaching patrols around nature reserves.
- Establishing programmes to increase prey numbers.
- Reducing poaching and illegal trade of live tigers and tiger parts.
- Ensuring conservation laws are enforced.

HUMANS ARE THE BIGGEST THREAT TO THESE BEAUTIFUL CATS.

- Tigers are killed by poachers for their skins.
- Their bones are used in Chinese medicine.
- The tigers prey is also poached.
- Their habitat is being destroyed as man increases in number.

In an effort to successfully conserve tigers in an increasingly human dominated landscape, the Tiger Corridor Initiative aims to identify and create safe passages for tigers to move between protected core populations. Based on Panthera's genetic corridor model for jaguars, the TCI envisions regional, bi-national, and national tiger corridors that ensure linked networks of healthy, genetically-related tiger populations. Panthera's Tigers Forever Program was officially launched in July 2006 with the main goal of increasing tiger numbers at key sites by 50% over the next ten years.

PANTHERA'S MISSION To ensure the future of wild cats through scientific leadership and global conservation action.

To ensure that tigers remain in the wild, Panthera is working with local communities, local and national governments, and conservation organizations across Asia to address the main threats facing tigers today. Using detailed geographic databases, to accurately pinpoint current tiger populations, suitable or potential tiger habitat, and likely dispersal corridors between tiger populations. Because tiger dispersal is still so poorly known, Panthera is creating a geographically-based model to predict routes of travel that provide the most secure passage between protected areas with the best available habitat.

As with other large, wide-ranging species, a long-term conservation strategy must go beyond isolated protected areas and plan for ways in which animals can move and survive in human-dominated landscapes.

Bhutan Could Act As A 'Tiger Nursery'

From a conservation perspective, the big deal here is that this discovery helps significantly with developing what Panthera calls a tiger corridor along the foothills of the Himalayas in India, Nepal and Bhutan, and on into Myanmar. That would eventually connect with another corridor through Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia.

The Badger

The badger is a large creature with black stripes and a big body. He is a friendly creature. He stays in gardens. He has dark eyes. He has lived a good many years, he has a history to him. He has a thick fur coat. There are some badger hunters. - *Sue Horncastle*

Intruder

It was two in the morning and I couldn't sleep. I went downstairs to get a drink of water and while I was standing by the kitchen window I heard deep, gruff voices just outside. I hastily checked the locks. The back door was secure. I strained to hear what they were saying but their voices are just a little too low for me to catch the words. Two men talking in an undertone – it sounded as if they were discussing the best way to break in. I turned on the kitchen light, hoping it would scare them away. Then I heard metal scraping against bricks. I realised that they must have a ladder! I ran upstairs to make sure that all the upstairs windows were closed and locked. They were. I turned on the lights so that they would know someone in the house was awake. My daughters woke up.

“What are you doing Mummy?” asked one. The other, sensing my anxiety, started to cry.

“Be quiet” I hissed, trying to look down into the garden from the bedroom window. I couldn't see anything. I decided to call the police, just to be on the safe side.

“I think I have intruders in my back garden. I can hear them talking.” I told the police officer who arrived within a couple of minutes, lights flashing on his car. He told me to lock the door before running down the alleyway beside my house and working his way through the tangled overgrowth to investigate. When he returned, he was smirking.

“Did you hear what they were talking about?” he asked me, facetiously

“No, they were talking too low” I explained. He laughed then and said

“Well there were a couple of intruders in your garden but they ran away when they saw me.” I must have looked terrified because he reassured me kindly - “Don't worry - it was just a pair of badgers!”

Ashley Jordan

October

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
31					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

The British Badger by Ashley Jordan

Badgers are shy, nocturnal creatures. They live in family groups of up to twelve badgers in a 'sett' - a series of underground tunnels and nesting chambers, often with many entrances. Some badger setts are hundreds of years old and have been extended and inhabited by many generations of badgers. Badgers are very hygienic animals and regularly clean out their sets, discarding old bedding and replacing it with fresh. They even dig latrines (dung pits) several metres away from the sett entrance. Badgers are omnivorous and eat a varied diet that includes earthworms, insects, rodents, seeds, berries, frogs and lizards. Badgers can live for up to fourteen years although, in the wild, most die before they are seven years old.

Threats to badgers

A huge number of badgers are killed by traffic on the roads. Badgers and their setts are protected by law. It is illegal to interfere with a badger set or to harm a badger in any way.

Humans pose the biggest threat to badgers. Farmers often kill badgers (illegally) suspecting that badgers spread Bovine TB. However there is no evidence for this and research shows that culling badgers does little or nothing to prevent the spread of Bovine TB. In July 2010, The Badger Trust successfully appealed against the decision to allow a cull of badgers in Pembrokeshire (Wales).

Badger-baiting and badger-digging are particularly cruel 'sports' in which badgers are forced to fight a succession of dogs. The badger is often deliberately disabled before the fight to minimise the risk of injury to the dog. (Claws filed down, canine teeth pulled out, tail nailed to the ground tendons in their back legs cut.) Badger baiting was made illegal in 1845, but sadly it still continues to this day.

What can you do?

1. Write to your MP and ask him or her to oppose the culling of Badgers and to support a programme of vaccination to prevent the spread of Bovine TB. You can also ask them to vote against lifting the ban on blood sports.
2. Vote for MPs who want to keep the blood sports ban in place. (You can find 'How MPs Stand' on the 'Save Me' website.)
3. Support organisations and charities that are working to protect badgers. (Donate, Volunteer, Campaign, Purchase / Make and Display or Wear) Literature, Bumper Stickers, Badges, T-Shirts and Mugs etc.) Anything that raises public awareness is helpful.

Organisations that are working to protect badgers.

1. The Badger Trust <http://www.badger.org.uk> 08458 287878
2. Save Me <http://www.save-me.org.uk>
3. Protect Our Wild Animals <http://www.powa.org.uk>
4. R.S.P.C.A. <http://www.rspca.org.uk>

THE CHINCHILLA

A ball of soft and fluffy fur
With a hundred plus follicle hairs
They are nervous, skittish creatures
Who hide in Andean lairs

Their fur makes them vulnerable
one hundred deaths to make a coat
So that people can wear real fur
to make other people gloat

Big Mickey Mouse ears to hear with
Strong legs to run like a hare
But eagles and coyote catch them
The only ones who dare

Chinchillas biggest enemy is MAN
Who kill thousands so they gloat
And all because there's people
Who want to wear a chinchillas lovely coat

So if you want a soft warm coat
Try sheep's wool that's just as fair
Because the silky, soft, warm chinchillas fur
Is meant for those creatures to wear

Bernard Weekes-Lock

November

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

The Chinchilla by Bernard Weekes-Lock and Sue Rabbett

The Chinchilla is a small gregarious rodent, inhabiting mountainous regions of the Andes in the countries of Peru and Chile. They have large 'Mickey Mouse' ears and their fur is very thick, up to one hundred and twenty hairs per follicle. They are independent creatures and will only do what they themselves feel like doing.

The Chinchilla are crepuscular and nocturnal. (They are active at dusk and at night.) They are bred in captivity for their fur. It takes approximately one hundred of these creatures to make one fur coat. This is why they have been virtually wiped out in their natural habitat.

They have continuously growing incisors and need to constantly gnaw as their teeth grow between one point one and two point two millimetres per week.

They like to bathe in sand and put on a great show when doing so.

The Chinchilla is vegetarian eating grasses, seeds, leaves, bark, cacti, fruit and dried berries, their favourite being rose-hips.

Ideally they breed once per year, having a gestation period of approximately one hundred and ten days and giving birth to no more than two young at a time. They are very clean creatures and do not smell. They can live for between fifteen to twenty years. - *Bernard Weekes-Lock*

The Chinchilla is a part of the rodent family and originates from the Andes, South America. An adult animal can be up to 30-36cm long including its bushy tail and weighs approximately 600-900 grams. Chinchilla's live between 8-10 years they have fine dense fur, stiff whiskas, large ears and eyes. Because their fur is so dense they can't harbour parasites, they are susceptible to heat strokes, so must take care not to get too hot.

PETS

Chinchilla's are gentle, timid and intelligent animals. Handled from a young age they will become tame and bond closely with their owners. They are active and playful. Chinchilla's are fine as a single pet or will work well as two of the same sex.

CAGES

Chinchilla's are rock hoppers that like to scurry, they require floor space rather than height. Cages should be made of galvanised welded wire mesh with holes no larger than 1.9cm square. A wooden area should be provided where the chinchilla can sit and also a raised floor which allows for droppings, urine and partially eaten food to fall through which helps keep the cage clean.

NUTRITION

Chinchilla's diets are fairly basic they do best on commercially produced pellets, good quality hay and water. Their digestive system is fairly sensitive.

HABITS

Chinchilla's are largely nocturnal so will be most active at night. Sometimes they are called crepuscular, meaning their activity peaks at dawn and dusk. They should be kept in a fairly quiet area during the day. Chinchilla's prefer a consistent routine for handling and feeding times and could be stressed out, if their routine changes.

DUST BATHS AND TOYS

Along with access to regular dust baths chinchilla's need a variety of toys to keep them busy and active, especially items for chewing to keep the incisor teeth in good condition.

ENDANGERED

When people discovered chinchillas' and how soft their fur was they became coats and they became endangered, it takes about 130-200 chinchillas' to make one fur coat. Chinchilla's were hunted to near extinction due to their beautiful coats. The short haired chinchilla has not been seen since in the wild since 1953. They are bred in fur farms for pets and for the fur trade. - *Sue Rabbett*

The Penguin

MELTDOWN

A penguin I, quite amenable.
In the dictionary,
I'm between penetrate and penial.

My friend, Peregrine, was swept away on an ice-flow.
I've lost him forever,
Do not know where he'll go.

My homeland is being occupied by bearded men in tents.
What are they doing here?
Upsetting all; it makes no sense.

So where do I go next?
To 'Marine World' maybe.
It gets me so vexed.

I belong here; I was born here;
I grew up here;
But will I die here?

There are too many of us for people to care.
We are dispensable.
The future I fear.

Robert Brandon

December

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

The Penguin by Sue Rabbett and Maria Gethin

Penguins are a group of flightless aquatic birds living almost exclusively in the southern hemisphere, especially in Antarctica. Most penguins feed on krill, fish, squid and other forms of sea life caught swimming under water. Penguins breed in large colonies. There can be up to 250,000 birds in a colony in the winter. The penguins take it in turns to There are many species of penguins. The smallest is the Little Blue Penguin and the largest is the Emperor Penguin.

Threats to Penguins.

The greatest danger to penguins comes from people. Plastic rubbish can trap penguins and actually kill them. Oil spilled from tankers and boats cleaning out their engines at sea have a disastrous effect on penguins. The oil matts their feathers, allowing the water to get in. Without a layer of warm air near the skin, penguins die of cold. If they do reach the shore , the oiled birds try to preen their feathers and end up swallowing some of the poisonous oil. Many people want to see the birds close up and if this isn't controlled properly it can seriously impact on the breeding colonies.

The emperor penguin can grow to four and half feet in height and looks very clumsy on land. However in the sea it is graceful and can twist and turn quickly in pursuit of its prey. It has developed an amazing ability to survive in the worlds harshest climate. Penguins huddle together for warmth and take it in turns to move to the centre of the huddle to warm up and then to the outside of the huddle to allow other penguins in to the centre. Emperor penguins don't have nests. They balance their egg on their feet, keeping it warmly covered under a pouch of fatty skin under their belly. If they drop their egg onto the ice it freezes and the chick inside will die. Chicks depend on their parents for survival between hatching and the growth of their waterproof feathers. Chicks' down feathers are not waterproof and they must stay away from water or mud. If they get wet they will die within a few minutes. The parents take it in turns to hunt for fish and crustaceans to bring back to the chick. If one of the parents fails to come back then the chick and the remaining parent will starve to death as well.

Organisations working to help penguins

The Penguin Foundation

<http://www.penguinfoundation.org.au>